United Nations A/70/427–S/2015/791

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
16 October 2015

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventieth session
Agenda item 34
Prevention of armed conflict

Security Council
Seventieth year

Letter dated 13 October 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I am writing to convey Armenia's grave concern about the significant escalation of tensions along the line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan and across the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan at the end of September 2015.

This latest escalation of tensions introduced new, alarming trends. First, there was an increase in the number of casualties among both the civilian population and military personnel. Three Armenian civilians from two border villages in Armenia were killed by Azerbaijani armed forces with the use of mortar launchers. The three victims were women, two of them elderly. They were killed in their own houses and farms, far from military positions.

Second, Azerbaijani armed forces shelled the military infrastructure of the Nagorno-Karabakh Defence Army, located 5 km from the line of contact, using 120 mm mortars, 107 mm rockets and 122 mm D-30 howitzers. The last-mentioned was used for the first time since the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 1994. The heavy shelling resulted in 4 casualties and 16 wounded from the Nagorno-Karabakh Defence Army.

Killing civilians in border territories and shelling military infrastructure far away from the line of contact demonstrate a deliberate choice by Azerbaijan to escalate tensions into new a stage of confrontation.

The intentional targeting of civilians, along with the systematic torture and killing of civilians from the border territory of Armenia who fell under the custody of Azerbaijan, may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Such crimes should not go unpunished. We call upon the international community to condemn in the strongest terms the crimes perpetrated against civilians.

15-18052 (E) 231015

Please recycle

It should be stressed that the timing of this deliberate escalation is certainly not accidental. Azerbaijan has developed an ill practice of escalating tensions, including at the expense of human casualties, ahead of important visits to the region and high-level meetings, thus undermining and impeding the negotiation process. The latest renewed provocation by Azerbaijan came as a response to the expectations expressed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-Chairs on holding productive talks between the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in New York at the end of September. I attach to the present letter a press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the meeting of Minster for Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandian with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs of 24 September 2015 (see annex I).

The introduction of an investigative mechanism to ceasefire violations is essential in maintaining a ceasefire and putting an end to the blame game. Armenia has once again reiterated its agreement to introduce such an investigative mechanism, while Azerbaijan continues to reject it. This fact is acknowledged by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group in their press releases of 26 September 2015. I attach to the present letter their statement (see annex II).

Furthermore, the consistent efforts of Azerbaijan to downsize the presence of the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office of OSCE fit into the overall policy of Azerbaijan to prevent the consolidation of a ceasefire.

Finally, it is evident that, when Baku is interested in a ceasefire, as was the case during the European Games, held in Azerbaijan in June 2015, its armed forces are able to maintain it quite efficiently. The data on ceasefire violations before, during and after this event are very illustrative in this regard. This fact points most clearly in the direction of the party initiating ceasefire violations.

Armenia firmly believes that the process of a political settlement of the conflict requires favourable conditions on the ground. To reach fair, lasting and negotiated peace, the ceasefire regime needs to be firmly consolidated and human casualties need to come to an end.

I kindly request that the present letter and its annexes be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 34, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Zohrab **Mnatsakanyan**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex I to the letter dated 13 October 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Edward Nalbandian meets Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group Co-Chairs

24 September 2015

Upon arrival in New York on the evening of 24 September, Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian had a meeting with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-Chairs, Igor Popov, James Warlick and Pierre Andrieu. Andrzej Kasprzyk, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, participated in the meeting.

The Foreign Minister of Armenia expressed his indignation to the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs over the gross violations of the ceasefire by Azerbaijan, which caused human losses among the civilian population.

"Azerbaijan has developed a bad practice of escalating the situation, even at the expense of human casualties, on the line of contact with Nagorno-Karabakh and the border with Armenia, ahead of important visits to the region and high-level meetings, thus undermining the meetings and impeding the negotiation process", underlined Minister Nalbandian.

Strongly condemning the killing of three Armenian citizens as a result of a ceasefire violation by Azerbaijan, Minister Nalbandian said, "This, yet another provocation by Azerbaijan, came as a response to the expectation, expressed by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, of holding productive talks between [the] Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers in New York".

The possible steps towards the stabilization of the situation were discussed at the meeting.

Annex II to the letter dated 13 October 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Press statement by the Co-Chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group

New York, 26 September 2015

The Co-Chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group (Ambassadors Igor Popov of the Russian Federation, James Warlick of the United States of America and Pierre Andrieu of France), together with the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, held a meeting on 24 September with the Foreign Minister of Armenia, Edward Nalbandian, and a separate meeting on 25 September with the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov. They also met jointly with the two foreign ministers to discuss the immediate need to reduce tensions along the line of contact and international border, to advance negotiations on a lasting settlement and to implement confidence-building measures. The ministers agreed to continue preparations with the Co-Chairs on the next presidential summit, which is expected to be held before the end of this year.

The Co-Chairs called for the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to accept an OSCE mechanism to investigate ceasefire violations. Without such a mechanism, the sides will continue to blame each other for initiating deadly attacks on the line of contact and Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Armenia has agreed to discuss the details of the mechanism, and we urged Azerbaijan to do the same.

The Co-Chairs condemned in strong terms the use of artillery that caused additional casualties in the last 24 hours. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of the deceased. An escalation of violence is not in the interest of Azerbaijanis or Armenians, or a negotiated settlement.

The Co-Chairs encouraged the sides to implement people-to-people programmes to build trust between societies affected by the conflict.